

Country and People

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are increasing in numbers. The average number of children reared in one family may be from three to four. The number of children born by one woman is not low; women with ten children are no exception. But as a rule no more than three or four children grow up to maturity in one family, the rest dying from want of reasonable nursing. It is common of time the natives are taught to take better care of their children, the population will no doubt strongly increase. A cause of the low birth rate in many families is the fact that a man is not supposed to have intercourse with his wife while a baby is nursing, that is, till the baby is from two to two and a half years old. They consider it a great shame for a woman to become pregnant before this time has elapsed. If such a case happens, they generally will say that the woman has committed adultery.

The Shilluk are tall in figure, the average height of the men being nearly 5 ft 6 in.* They are generally lean, rather narrow in the shoulders, and have but thin calves; their arms and legs are long, especially the legs below the knees and the forearms; hands and feet are small. A characteristic posture of the Shilluk man is to stand on one leg, and leaning the other, press the sole of his foot against the inner surface of the knee, while one hand holds a spear stuck into the ground; he will stand thus for hours, looking admiringly at his cattle. They are very clever in running and jumping, and are capable of sustaining considerable fatigue.

Their skin is dark, almost black; albinism seems to be rare. The physical appearance of the Shilluk is not that of pure negroes, they might rather be called negroids, in spite of their dark colour. Most of them have a fierce, sometimes a proud, haughty look. The cheek-bones and lips are protruding, but not excessively; the nose is flat, but high noses are not infrequent. Young people of both sexes are finely built, while in old age they generally become very thin and bony. Their gait is erect and elastic.

What makes the Shilluk look most ugly and almost frightful in the eyes of a stranger, is their habit of smearing the whole body. While the lower part is covered with ash, the breast and head are painted with red earth or with chalk, or, if they can afford it, with oil or butter. Sometimes the whole body is painted white or red, and lines or figures are drawn across the face.

Like most Nilotic negroes the Shilluk remove the lower incisors; this is done in early childhood; its omission would, in the belief of the natives, cause sickness; for instance, a case occurred where the teeth were taken out to cure sore eyes; a woman who had just had them removed from her child, said that unless they were taken out, her child would undoubtedly be deformed in some way, when it grew to maturity. Another explanation for extracting the teeth

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* See last but not last.

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to lift. However the delay was quite simply explained. Nyikang was not ready. A hitch had occurred in finding the cloth for his body. (A new effigy of Nyikang is made for each risk, and on the death of a risk the old effigy is destroyed). Another delay was caused by the Oromo messengers sent from Fashoda to Akurwa to say that all was ready. They dangled on the way. 643 718

On the 26th February "Nyikang" and "Dak" started on their way. First they must beat the bounds of Shilluk country proper, and they went to Morn, some five miles north of Kaka market. The procession was first observed in the section of "Thorr" just south of Kaka.

Nyikang and Dak are carried by men of the Kwanyikwom clan who live at Akurwa. They are surrounded by the youths of the Kwanyikwom carrying whips to drive away the inquisitive or profane. As Nyikang passes through a section of the Shilluk country, the men of the section escort him to their borders. Anyone who is beaten by the whips of the Kwanyikwom is said to be held to ransom until he pays a fine of a goat. There are various offences for which Nyikang penalizes people on the way. Nyikang's image is made from ostrich feathers and bamboo. It is therefore sacrilege for a Shilluk to be seen with an ostrich feather in his hair or carrying bamboo. The ritual of burial must be completed for all who have recently died. Nyikang must not pass anything unclean. In Nyikang's presence Shilluk must not present a warlike appearance. A man carrying a spear may not have a shield as well, and a man with a shield is only allowed a millet stalk. Nyikang advances with his son Dak at a loping trot of about 6 m.p.h. escorted by the Kwanyikwom and the men of the section through which he is passing. As he approaches a village the people dash out as if to ward him off, but quickly over-powered they soon join the procession. It is usual for gifts of a sheep or a goat to be presented to or exacted by Nyikang, and it was noticeable how all small stock and fowl were either shut up or driven away from the vicinity of Nyikang, for Nyikang has a right to anything he fancies. As Nyikang proceeds with Dak his son beside him, the escort chants 643 718 [481] [431]

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were as long as the body. Dak could rest on the ground⁶⁴³ on the end of the bamboo pole, but Nyikang was never taken off the shoulder⁷⁷⁸ of the man carrying him.

As the procession started another sheep was sacrificed and the blood sprinkled on the ground in front of the marching men. Dak⁶⁴³ and Nyikang led side by side, with the two drummers taking their⁵³³ positions on each side and constantly beating the drums. The men with the six baskets came next, and then the men with bundles of sticks and ropes. Finally all the followers fell in behind.

The village was circled three times at a half trot, all keeping time with the drums, and then they started for Fashoda at 9.30 a.m.⁷⁴⁸ Relatively few people were in the procession as they started, but hundreds began to gather in from all sides until there were approximately six hundred followers when they reached the *kel wi jang* (place of calling together). Two hours were required for the procession to go two miles, for there was much dancing and singing, moving forward and again backwards, along the whole way. As the people danced along in rhythm to the drumbeat they also sang "open your mouth, Great One, and bring us your promises" or "open your mouth and answer our baggings." From time to time Dak would run out ahead as if to survey the road, and then come back to his place beside Nyikang.⁵³³ If the people crowded too close, Dak would run after them, and everyone would scatter as if the devil were after them.⁵³⁷

On reaching a spot within half a mile of Fashoda the procession stopped and waited until messengers had gone to meet the king's party coming from Debalo. They brought back with them some cattle tethering ropes as tokens of the cows and bulls to be paid. One or two of these were refused by the elders who were gathered under a tree, and the messengers had to go back again. Finally all was arranged, and with much shouting and drum beating, the procession started for Fashoda to meet and fight with the followers of the approaching king.

17. We think that Dak never rested directly on the ground but on the bears.